

Statement on Congressional Action on Proposed Foster Care Legislation November 20, 1999

Hillary and I are very pleased that the Congress today approved H.R. 3443, "Foster Care Independence Act of 1999." This legislation helps ensure that young people in foster care get the tools they need to make the most of their lives. It builds on proposals in my budget to empower those leaving foster care by providing them access to health care, better educational opportunities, training, housing assistance, counseling, and other support and services. We cannot let these young people walk their tough road alone.

Each year approximately 20,000 18-year-olds leave our Nation's foster care system without an adoptive family or other permanent family relationship. Without the emotional, social, and financial support that families provide, many of these young people are not adequately prepared for life after foster care. Unfortunately, Federal financial support ends just as they are making the critical transition to independence. This bill addresses that problem and will help these youth in their effort to become successful, independent adults.

I am also pleased that the Act provides additional funds for the adoption incentive payments, which are bonuses to the States for increasing the number of children adopted from public foster care. This additional funding will enable States to receive the full amount of the bonuses they have earned through outstanding performance.

Today's legislation is a fitting tribute to the late Senator John Chafee, who was a chief sponsor of the Act. A fierce champion of children, Senator Chafee paid particular attention to our Nation's most vulnerable young people. I am pleased that the bill renames the Independent Living Program in his honor.

I would also like to thank the House and Senate leadership, as well as Representatives Nancy Johnson and Ben Cardin, Chairman William Roth, Jr., and Senators Jay Rockefeller, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Charles Grassley, John Breaux, James Jeffords, Jack Reed, and Susan Collins for their hard work and dedication to this issue. I look forward to signing this bill into law.

Statement on Signing the Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 November 20, 1999

Today I have signed into law S. 468, the "Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999." I strongly support the objective of this legislation—to make it easier for State, local, and tribal governments and non-profit organizations to apply for and report on financial assistance. While different types of grant programs can and should have different applications, there is ample room for consolidation and streamlining of similar programs.

Nonetheless, I have strong reservations about some of the specific provisions in the Act. In particular, as my Administration has indicated to the Congress on several occasions, the Act does not provide resources for, nor allow sufficient time to accomplish even partially, the very ambitious overhaul of grant programs that it re-

quires. In addition, the Act anticipates a common application and reporting system for Federal grant programs, but does not amend the many program statutes that establish different application and reporting requirements for different grant programs. Furthermore, the deadlines in the Act are inconsistent with other legislation and unlikely to be achievable in practice. For example, the Act requires agencies to create a common system for electronic processing of all grant programs, but on a schedule that is inconsistent with related requirements of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act of 1998. For these reasons, even an extensive effort may yield only minimal improvements in the simplification of the grants process and the administration of Federal resources.